



# Connecting Today's Kids with Nature: A Policy Action Plan

SUMMARY OF A REPORT FROM NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

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**"GO OUTSIDE AND PLAY,"** is a familiar phrase to many of us, but the simple truth is that kids today aren't heeding this call. Research shows that children today spend half as much time outside as kids did 20 years ago. In fact, they are spending an average of 6 and a half hours a day "plugged into" electronic media. Author Richard Louv describes this phenomenon as "nature deficit"

The National Wildlife Federation is committed to reversing this trend. Children should have access to the outdoors and time to explore the wonders of nature, time to establish connections that will last a lifetime.

## WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Nature deficit has a profound impact on our children's mental and physical health. In the last 20 years, while time spent playing outdoors has been cut in half, childhood obesity has more than doubled and adolescent obesity has tripled. The cost of this childhood obesity could topple \$100 billion annually to our public health systems. Research has linked this obesity epidemic to a lack of playtime outdoors.

While physical activity through organized sports can help address childhood obesity, the medical community recognizes that free unstructured time outdoors has unique health benefits to children. Time in nature improves a child's academic performance, concentration, balance, coordination and self esteem. It stimulates imagination and can even reduce the symptoms associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

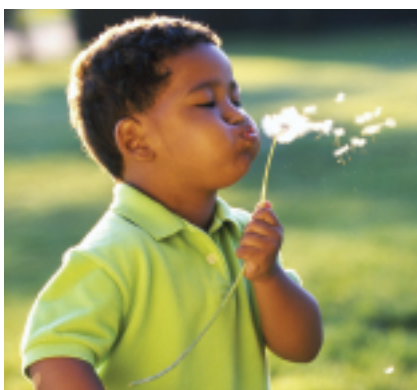
Children who spend time in nature are also more likely to carry a love for the natural world into their adult years. If nature deficit continues, we may face a dearth of environmental leaders at a time when we face unprecedented environmental challenges including habitat loss and global warming.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

### CLOSE TO HOME

Solving this problem can start right outside your backdoor. Spend time with kids outside on a regular basis, go fishing, take a hike or just go for a walk and look at the clouds. The

National Wildlife Federation recommends that parents give their children a Green Hour every day, time for unstructured play and exploration with the natural



world. Free play in nature will improve their physical fitness and immune system. Being outdoors helped President Theodore Roosevelt overcome his childhood asthma and become a great conservationist. Time with Mother Nature also reduces anxiety while nurturing imaginations. Best of all, it's FUN! To give parents and caregivers the information, tools and easy ideas they need to get their kids outside, NWF has created [www.GreenHour.org](http://www.GreenHour.org).



## IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Get the word out – Talk to health professionals, teachers, day care providers, after school care providers, and urge them to incorporate free, unstructured time outside for youth into their everyday practice. Research shows that 80 percent of children are enrolled in some kind of after school program. Encourage those program directors to make exploring nature part of their program plans. Work with your local PTA to create an event focused on getting children outside like a “Take Your Child Outside” Day. Get your neighborhood or community to participate in events like the National Wildlife Federation’s Great American Backyard Campout and Wildlife Watch, or International Migratory Bird Day.



## IN YOUR STATE

Join others in asking your governor and state legislators to pass state environmental education legislation to promote outdoor time for school children, and to increase funding for updating environmental education programs. Get your elected leaders to adopt a “No Child Left Inside” state policy that supports increased opportunities for free unstructured time outside for kids.

## AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The federal government has an important role in supporting opportunities for children to play outdoors. Let your federal officials know you want them to pass a

**No Child Left Inside Act** that will enhance and support environmental education in grades K-12. Tell them to reauthorize the **National Environmental Education Act** and increase critical funding and support for vital environmental education programs.

**Together we can reverse our children’s nature deficit and ensure that kids have the opportunity, the space, the encouragement and the enthusiasm to “Go Outside and Play.”**

The full report and information on helping the National Wildlife Federation reverse nature deficit can be found at [www.nwf.org/kidsoutside](http://www.nwf.org/kidsoutside)



**INSPIRING AMERICANS TO PROTECT WILDLIFE FOR OUR CHILDREN’S FUTURE.**